

# CONSUMER VOICES FOR CHANGE...

## YOU ARE YOUR OWN ADVOCATES

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does.”*

*-- Margaret Mead*

### What is advocacy?

Advocacy is making an earnest effort to influence the actions or decisions of persons within the political, social and economic institutions of society and the major institutions, which affect people's lives.

Advocacy involves organised efforts and actions. Consumers should band together and have their voices heard, thereby influencing public policies, laws and public attitudes. This voice helps to create a **vision of “what should be”** in a just and decent society.

### **Consumer Advocacy has purposeful aims:**

- ❖ To enable social justice - you can have a voice in influencing social change at the political and even international level;
- ❖ To change the power relationships between businesses and consumers
- ❖ To bring a clear improvement to people's lives.

Consumers represent the largest economic group and consumer concerns should therefore form a central part of any agenda for public discussions.

### How to Advocate

**Speak Out!!!**

**You have a Right to be heard/A Right to Representation**



## **If the system Does Not Work, Change It**

Public demonstrations and protests do not have to be the first action in any attempt to influence change. Do your research and take your concerns to the highest level.

As consumers you can organize in groups to have your concerns aired so that policy makers and businesspersons will be more inclined to listen. A peaceful protest for example is more likely to be effective if the group gathers evidence and properly documents the problems being faced in order to make them public.

## **Why Should I Be an Advocate?**

### **The Work of EACH individual Helps**

You do not need to be nationally recognized in order to help improve your world. Letters to elected representatives and petitions are helpful in successful advocacy.

Become more involved in influencing change. Find out if an organization already exists which is advocating for the same issue as you are. If not, form your own group. Remember, there is strength in numbers!

### **Take Action and Encourage Others to join you**

You can influence decisions, which affect your access to basic items, the quality and delivery of products and services, and the general quality of your life as well as the lives of those in your community.

Helping the world is helping yourself!

## **Representation is a Right**

To ensure that consumers have a voice in all the changes that are taking place at the international level, consumer advocates and consumer protection agencies need to exercise their own form of globalisation by creating international networks.

The United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection was one of the first achievements of the consumer movement in getting its voice heard at the international level. Non-government Consumer organizations such as Consumers International have used these guidelines in advocating for the formulation of laws, which are used as a code of reference in correcting violations of consumer rights in the market place.

Non-government organisations (NGOs) supplement the efforts made by government. The primary role of NGOs is to provide:



Selfless, voluntary, non-discriminatory service,

- ◆ Joint action/programmes at the national level,
- ◆ Public awareness through the mass media.

### Non-Government Consumer Advocacy Groups in Jamaica

From the initiation of the local *Consumer Alliance* in Jamaica, three organisations have so far been recognised as members of this movement- **The National Consumers' League, United Consumers in Action** (1994-1997), and the **Combined Disabilities Association**.

The Consumer Affairs Commission supports the activities, and encourages the creation of such groups in areas such as:

- ◆ Informing and educating consumers;
- ◆ Assisting consumers to obtain redress;
- ◆ Promoting “better business” principles; and
- ◆ Fostering greater vigilance in relation to trade practices

### **Complain Successfully!!**



As an advocate, it is important to learn to effectively communicate your concerns and problems with the issues you face daily. One way is by writing to representatives or organisations, stating how their actions are impacting on you.

#### **Write successful Complaint Letters by:**

- ◆ Taking the time to find the appropriate contact person and contact address
- ◆ Being polite
- ◆ Keeping it short and specific
- ◆ Including your recommended solution
- ◆ Illustrating how the item or service you are complaining about negatively impacts the business
- ◆ Making it easy to read
- ◆ Following up with telephone calls to persons with whom you have established contact.

#### **Complain in Person:**

- Assemble all the Facts
- Complain Before it is too late
- Remain calm
- Present your case in a clear and concise manner.

***“Don’t agonize. Organize.”***

*-- Florynce Kennedy*

Call us!



*or visit us at our website:*

[www.consumeraffairsjamaica.gov.jm](http://www.consumeraffairsjamaica.gov.jm)